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A
DISSUASIVE from STEALING.

A
S E R M O N 4

PREACHED AT
HOLTON, in SUFFOLK.

INSCRIBED TO THE
SOCIETY for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

By STEPHEN WHITE, M.A. K
RECTOR OF HOLTON.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

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PASTOR OF HOLTON

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L O N D O N

Printed for J. W. L. FRANCIS and C. COOPER
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EPHES. IV. 28.

Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

THE Apostle, in this Chapter, exhorts the *Epheſians* to forſake their former Converſation, which they had paſſed their Lives in, while they were in their Heathen State: And in a particular Manner preſſes them to the ſtrict Obſervance of ſeveral of the great ſocial Virtues; whereof *Juſtice*, in Oppoſition to *Stealing*, is one; *Honeſt Industry*, a ſecond; and *Alms-giving*, a third; which he here recommends, even to Perſons in mean Circumſtances. *Let him that ſtole*, ſays he, before his Converſion, now that he is become a Chriſtian, *ſteal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good; that he may have, not only what is ſufficient for himſelf, but ſomewhat alſo to give to him that needeth.*

My Deſign in this Diſcourſe will in a great Measure confine me to the firſt of theſe, *viz.* The Prohibition of Theft. To enforce which I ſhall lay before you ſeveral Conſiderations, though the firſt I ſhall offer ought to be ſufficient, which is, the *Authority of God himſelf*; who has given us a poſitive Commandment, and delivered it Himſelf, with great Solemnity, ſaying, **THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.**

God, who made all Things, is the great Proprietor of the World, and all Things therein; and, under certain Limitations, He has transferred this Right to Man, and *made him have Dominion over the Works of his Hands.* Had Man continued in a *State of Innocence*, and every one been reasonable in his Desires, and well satisfied with what was sufficient to make him happy; he might have enjoyed in *common*, and without Labour and Sorrow, the plentiful Provision which God hath made; and the Earth, of its own Accord, produced for him: But after Man had sinned, and the Ground was cursed for his Sake, and he was doomed *in the Sweat of his Face to eat Bread*, and when *Men began to multiply on the Earth*; then Covetousness, Fraud, and Violence, were introduced into the World; and it became necessary to divide into distinct Rights and Properties, those Things which before were in common: And this Division being once made, it was fit, that every one should be content with his *own Lot*, and not invade the Right and Property of others. And this is so apparently just and reasonable, that the righteous Judge of the World, and Lord of all Things, has fenced Mens Properties by a Law written in our Hearts.

For even before this Law of God was published, Mankind was sufficiently sensible of the great Guilt of Stealing. When *Joseph*, out of Policy to stay his Brethren, had caused them to be accused of stealing his Cup; they disclaimed

disclaimed the Charge with the greatest Vehemence, and acknowledged this Crime to be worthy of Death: *God forbid that thy Servants should do according to this Thing: with whomsoever it be found, let him die, Gen. xlv. 7. 9.*

Under the Jewish Law, it was ordered by God himself, in many Cases, that *if a Thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, no Blood should be shed for him*: His Life should be accounted justly forfeited by his Crime. The Prophet *Jeremiah* ranks this with the blackest Crimes; and, in the Name of the Lord, severely reproaches those, who, with so much Guilt upon their Souls, presume to make their Appearance in the House of God, Chap. vii. 9. *Will ye steal, Murder, and commit Adultery, and swear falsely, and yet come and stand before me in this House, which is called by my Name? Is this House which is called by my Name, become a Den of Robbers in your Eyes? Is it fit, think you, that they who are so unjust to their Neighbour, should at the same Time pretend to worship God? What hast thou to do, saith God to the wicked Man in the 50th Psalm, to declare my Statutes, or take my Covenant in thy Mouth? When thou sawest a Thief, thou consentedst unto him; by which, I suppose, is meant the Aiding or Abetting a Thief; which is too frequently done by receiving and concealing his stolen Goods. And this, let it be observed, is one of the Crimes, for which the wicked Man here is, in a solemn Manner, declared by God, to be unworthy to*

take his Covenant in his Mouth, i. e. unworthy to read the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

And if the Sin we are speaking of be so severely censured and punished, under the imperfect Dispensation of the Law of *Moses*; it is, we may be sure, much more inconsistent with the Duty of a Christian. We are bound by the strongest Endearments, to *do Good* to one another: What then will become of us, if, instead of distributing what is our *own*, we invade the Property of *others*? The Duties of *Charity* and *Beneficence* are indispensably required at our Hands: How then shall we escape, if we violate the plainest Laws of *common Justice*? And if the Man who is true and just in all his Dealings, for want of *Charity*, or a charitable Disposition, shall not be saved, where shall the *Thief* and the *Robber* appear? And, therefore, we find that Theft has a constant Place in the black Catalogue of Vices, which, our Saviour has told us, *defile the Man*; make him unclean and hateful in the Sight of God; and which, according to St. *Paul*, exclude Men from *the Kingdom of Heaven*.

II. Or if these Men will not hearken to the Commands of God, yet if they will but, *secondly*, consent to be governed by the *plainest Reason*, if they will but consult their own *depraved Reason*, (for I will venture to appeal to the Reason of the most infamous among themselves,) and this will shew them the Wickedness of their Doings. For can they bear, that any of those Things should be taken from *them*, by Fraud or Violence, which they,
by

by the same Means, have taken away from the rightful Owners? With what Rage and Fury will they fly in the Face of their Associates, if they go about to deprive them of their Share in the unrighteous Plunder?—Now, if in their own Opinion, it be so base, and so provoking, *to rob a Thief* of what he has no Title to; how much baser, and wickedder, must the Thief himself appear, in the Sight of God and Man, who often robs *the honest and industrious*, of what, by the Laws of God and Man, he has a Right to enjoy?

Besides, these Men know too well that even a Gang of Thieves cannot carry on their wicked Purposes together, without being true and just to one another: No more can any Society of Men subsist, unless the Rules of Justice and Honesty be observed, and Mens Properties secured from all unjust Invasions. So that the natural Tendency of Theft is to subvert all Government; dissolve the Bands of Society; and turn the good order of the World into a lawless State of Rapine and Violence. Now those Persons are widely mistaken, if there be any so weak as to imagine, that even the lowest of the People would find their Account in such a State of Things. They who have nothing to lose, might be Gainers for a while, by the common Plunder; but would soon perceive themselves unable to keep and enjoy it: On the Contrary, they would find themselves deprived of that Maintenance and Protection, which, by the Laws of their Country, and the Charity of well-disposed

People, are now afforded them : and in short, that the Small and the Great would by this Means be involved in equal Ruin and Confusion.

But since we have little Reason to suppose, that they who are addicted to such a scandalous Vice as Stealing, can be influenced by a Sense of Religion; or the Fear of God ; or even the Dictates of Reason : I shall proceed to *Considerations of another Nature*, as more suitable to the Persons to whom this Discourse is directed. Let those, therefore, who allow themselves in this infamous Practice, consider,

III. What *uneasy Apprehensions* they continually live under of *being discovered*. They know that Men are very vigilant and careful, in securing their worldly Possessions : That they keep a strict Watch over all such Persons, whose Character, and Manner of Living, do not place them above Suspicion. And besides this, they are, in many Cases, under constant *Fears*, and just Reason they have to be afraid, of being betrayed by their *Accomplices* ; for they, whose Consciences will allow them to rob an innocent Person, will hardly scruple to discover a thievish Companion, whenever they can save themselves harmless, or perhaps be rewarded for so doing. Or, suppose the natural Deceitfulness of such Persons does not extend to their *Associates* ; suppose they will be *faithful* to their *wicked Partners*, while they are *false* to all the World besides ; which is indeed too often the Case. Yet, whenever any of these Persons are brought to a Sense of their Guilt, and to repent
of

of their Sins; they will find themselves obliged, nay, if they are truly penitent, they will be ready and desirous, to discover their own, and their Companions Wickedness, in order to do Justice to those whom they have defrauded, and to secure them from future Injuries; which is the best Method they can take, to obtain Forgiveness both of God and Man.

But it may be said, that the *pilfering Thief*, who deals in *smaller Matters*, has no need of any Associates at all; and therefore, if he can but carry off and conceal his Prize, he may be easy and secure, as having no one privy to his evil Practices besides himself. *Easy* he cannot be, unless he can conceal his Wickedness from God and his own Conscience: Neither can he be *secure* that he shall not *himself* discover his own Crimes, in Spite of all his Arts; nay, by Means of those very Arts and Endeavours which he uses to conceal them: He runs, when no Man pursueth; he hides himself, before he is sought after: His Over-forwardness in clearing himself before he is accused, brings him into Suspicion; and when he finds himself suspected, his faltering Speech and Self-contradiction discover his Guilt. Or if some few can order their Words so artificially, as to tell a great Number of Lies, consistent with one another (which they will find a very difficult Task); yet there is scarce one in a thousand, when suspected and examined, who can set, what these Wretches call, a *good Face* upon the Matter, so as to prevent your reading their Crimes in the Confusion of their

Countenances. So many are the Ways, which God, who sees through the darkeſt Receſſes of wicked Mens Minds, has appointed, to bring their evil Practices to Light: So difficult is it, to go on long in theſe Ways of Wickedneſs, without being detected; and ſo utterly impoſſible to avoid the continual Fears and Apprehenſions of a Diſcovery; which muſt be ſuch an uneaſy State of Mind as all their unlawful Gains cannot make them Amends for. But let them proceed to conſider,

IV. The *bad Effects* of ſuch Practices, after they are diſcovered: The firſt of which is *Shame*. When a Thief is ſurprized in the Commiſſion of his Wickedneſs, how does he hang down his Head, and let fall his Countenance, as unable to look his injured Neighbour, or any honeſt Man, in the Face. Nay, he muſt be a hardened Sinner indeed, if he can forbear bluſhing to himſelf alone, when a Diſcovery of his evil Deeds forces him to conſider the Meaneſs and Baſeneſs of them; and how odious they render him in the Sight of God, and all good Men. It is no Wonder he chuſes the Night, to cover thoſe Sins from the Notice of Men, which are ſo diſgraceful to human Nature, and makes him reſemble the wild Beaſts in the Wilderneſs, who ſtroll about in the Night, ſeeking for their Prey. *God makes the Day*, the Pſalmiſt obſerves, *that Man ſhould go forth to his Work and to his Labour, until the Evening*: Then the laborious, honeſt Man, lays him down, and takes his Reſt. *He maketh Darkneſs alſo, that it may be Night,*

Night, wherein all the Beasts of the Forests do move: Then the Thief moves likewise, but after a very different Manner; for the Lions, it is said, *roar after their Prey*; they boldly claim it as their own; and so it is by the Will of Providence; *they seek their Meat from God*; it is the Will of God, that the Creatures he has made so ravenous, should be sustained and fed by this Means. But the skulking Thief creeps about in fearful Silence; he starts at the shaking of a Leaf, and trembles too, as that does; for he knows he is not *seeking his Meat from God*, but, by the Instigation of the Devil, is robbing his Neighbour of that, which perhaps he had hardly earned, by the Sweat of his Brows. And this must needs expose him to the utmost Shame and Contempt, as soon as he is discovered.

But the Shame which covers his Face, will not repair the Wrongs he has done to his Neighbour; for there is a second very natural Effect of a Discovery, which is *Restitution*: He will be obliged to restore what he has taken by Stealth, if it be in his Power; and then what Advantage does he reap by stealing it?

Neither will this satisfy even human Justice: there still remains what he most of all dreads, and that is, such *corporal Punishment* as the Laws of his Country have appointed for his Crimes; to be shamefully *scourged* in the public Street; to be dragged to a *noisome Goal*, as unfit for human Society; and unworthy to breathe in the common Air; to be *branded* with some indelible Mark of Infamy. To be made

made a *public Spectacle* of Contempt; and, in some Cases, to be put to a violent and ignominious *Death*, by the Hands of the Executioner. And oh! how dreadful a Thing it is, not only for the wretched Criminal who suffers, but for every Spectator who beholds, or even for any of us but to think of, and imagine he beholds a Person in perfect Health, and, as it commonly happens, in the Flower of his Age, taking a *shameful Farewel* of the World; leaving a certain, though unjust *Reproach* to his Children's Children; and hurried away from the Bar of *human Justice*, to appear before the *awful Tribunal of Heaven*?

These are the known Fruits which all who follow such wicked Courses may expect to reap, whenever their Crimes are discovered. But should they be for ever concealed from the Notice of Men, yet let them know, what I would more earnestly entreat them to consider, in the

Vith Place, That the *Eye of God* is always upon them; they can go no where from his Presence; Darkness cannot cover their Designs, nor hide them from his View, nor save them from his Vengeance. *His Vengeance*, I know, they are apt to look upon as a Thing at a Distance, which will not overtake them, before they come into another World. Alas! how many Ways do these Men deceive themselves? Another World cannot be very far from any of us, but the *Thief* has more Reason than most others, to look upon it as near at Hand; because, if public Justice do not reach him, yet God has threatened, by the secret De-

signation of his Providence, to cut such wicked Men off in the Career of their Sins: *He that getteth Riches, and not by Right* (says the Prophet *Jeremiah*, Chap. xvii. 11.) *shall leave them in the Midst of his Days.* Besides, there is a secret Curse denounced against them while they continue in this World: *I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of Hosts,* (Zechariah v. 4.) *and it shall enter into the House of the Thief, and it shall remain in the Midst of his House, and shall consume it, with the Timber thereof, and the Stones thereof.* Whence we see, that this Sin, instead of establishing a Man's House, and increasing his Substance, brings oftentimes utter Destruction on all that belongs to him; nay, and entails a Curse upon his Posterity; for it is concerning such Persons that *Job* speaks, when he tells us, *God layeth up his Iniquity for his Children*, Chap. xxi. 19. A just God cannot charge a Man's Children with the Guilt of his Crimes, but He may take from the Children, or not suffer them to prosper in the Possession of that which the Parent had gotten by dishonest Practices.

But because it is much easier to stop the *Beginnings of Vice*, than to reclaim a hardened Sinner; therefore, what has been said concerning Theft in general, I desire may now be applied to the *smaller Instances of Stealing*; which the Scripture forbids, under the Expression of *Purloining*. And this, by the Way, is particularly forbidden to Servants, *Tit. ii. 10. Not purloining, but shewing all good Fidelity.* And indeed there is great Occasion for this
Caution,

Caution, because many Servants are apt to think it a small Matter to *make bold*, as they term it, with their Master's Goods; especially if they keep them not for their own Use, but bestow them on their Friends and Acquaintance: not considering that this is not only a downright *Theft*, but likewise a *Breach* of that *Trust* which is reposed in them; and therefore a greater Sin, than it would be to steal the same Things from another Person. It must grieve the Heart of every good Man, to observe, how very early many *Children* contract such a Habit of Stealing, that the meanest Trifle cannot escape their Fingers. They are listed into the Service of the Devil, as soon almost as they are dedicated to God in their Baptism. Nay, it is very credibly reported, that in some Places they are taught, even by their *wicked Parents*, to go through *formal Exercises*, by which their little Hands are instructed in *Picking* and *Stealing*, with more Care and Pains, than might learn them *to labour truly to get their own Living*. And by being thus brought up in the Practice of this Vice in their tender Years, they come to have no Sense at all of the *Guilt*, and very little Regard to the *Danger* of it; but constantly look upon Thieving as the *Craft*, or *Trade*, they are to live by; and value themselves not a little when they excel their Companions. Now it would give no small Check to this strange Sort of Pride, if they would hear the Words of a pious Author*: "Thou thinkest

and thou makest *Whole Day of Man's labour but a nothing* " thou

“ thou hast been very cunning, when thou
 “ hast over-reached thy Brother ; but God
 “ knows, all the while there is another over-
 “ reaching Thee, and cheating Thee of what
 “ is infinitely more precious, even thy Soul.
 “ — So thou, that art gaping to swallow up
 “ thy poor Brother, art thyself made a Prey
 “ to the great Devourer.”

And as for the *Parents* above-mentioned,
 who, instead of training up their Children in
 the Way wherein they should go, lead them
 into, and urge them on, in these Ways of
 Wickedness. If I could suppose myself to be
 speaking to any such, methinks I could ex-
 postulate with them, in such a Manner, as
 would make them ashamed of such horrid
 Wickedness: “ You must not, indeed, pre-
 “ tend to a *rational Love* of your Child-
 “ ren, for that would appear by storing
 “ their Minds with good Dispositions, and
 “ procuring for them such Benefits and
 “ Blessings, as they would have Reason to
 “ thank you for another Day: But you may
 “ have such a *Fondness* and *Affection* for them,
 “ as *natural Instinct* produces; and can you
 “ bear to think that these very Children,
 “ whom you now pretend to be so dear to you,
 “ should be for ever miserable? Can you bear
 “ to think, that You yourselves shall be the
 “ Occasion of their eternal Misery; not only
 “ by bringing them into a wicked World, and
 “ leaving them to the Naughtiness of their
 “ own Hearts, which is commonly enough to
 “ undo them; but by actually *teaching, nay,*
 “ *forcing*

“ forcing them to work Wickedness? And if
 “ these Considerations are not sufficient to
 “ affect You, I would ask once more, whether
 “ You can endure the Thought of being your-
 “ selves condemned to endless Torments, for
 “ your *Childrens Sins* as well as your *own*? to
 “ have your own Children to be your *Accusers*
 “ at the last Day; and perhaps appointed to
 “ be your *Tormentors* too, for ever and ever?”

But to proceed: In Country Places, where
 Mens Goods lie exposed in the open Fields,
 much Dexterity in Stealing is not required:
 but here, the Easiness of Theft tempts many
 to be guilty of it, and the Number of Thieves
 helps to skreen them from Punishment, and
 serves too, in *their* Way of Reasoning, even to
 justify a plain Breach of God's Commandment.

And here again we must, with Grief of
 Heart observe, many Parents sending out
 their innocent Children (they would be inno-
 cent, if their Parents would suffer them to be
 so) as soon as they are able to go abroad, to
 pick and steal what they can find; and some-
 thing they *must* find, or they are sure to receive
 such Stripes at their Return Home, which
 ought to be laid, an hundred Fold, on the
 Backs of their *Correctors*.

And now I am upon small Thefts, I will
 instance in one, which is commonly and shame-
 lessly practised in these Parts; I mean, the
 stealing of *Wood*; or other *Fuel*.

The Persons who are guilty of this, may
 perhaps think it hard to be ranked among the
 common Herd of Thieves; but if Men will be

be Thieves, they must bear to be called so: Let us hear, however, what it is they usually plead in their own Defence.

And first, they tell us, that what they steal is of *no great Value*; and was the Labour and Pains they take in getting it to be considered, it commonly comes dearer to them, than what they purchase. It is, I believe, very true, that little or nothing is got by such Practices; and yet a great deal of Mischief is done to the Persons who are injured. Now if a Man will do to his Neighbour a considerable Injury, without procuring hardly any Advantage to himself, sure the Smallness of his Gains can never be pleaded in Excuse, since it is plainly an Aggravation of his Wickedness; for the smaller the Temptation is to any Sin, the greater, doubtless, is the Guilt of it.

Besides, when such an one comes to die (at which Time, most wicked Men are forced to consider their Ways,) and *computes together* the several Injuries he has done to others, by stealing Things of *little Value*; he will commonly find, that he has done more Mischief, in the Course of his Life, by *frequent Pilfering*, than many others, who have forfeited, and lost their Lives, by one *single Act of Robbery*. And as the former is seldom punished in this World, he has Reason to expect a more dreadful Reckoning in the World to come: especially, when it is considered, that God does not estimate the Guilt of Sin, by the outward Action, or by the Greatness or Smallness of the Subject-matter of it, but by the

the Degrees of Evil, which he sees in the Sinner's Disposition. He who so graciously accepted the Widow's Mite, on Account of her Inability to give more; He who accepts a willing Mind for a Deed of Charity, will doubtless, for the same Reason, esteem him a great Criminal who steals only the *smallest Things*, if He sees in him such a *thievish Disposition*, that it is only Want of Opportunity, or Want of Courage, which hinders him from stealing greater.

We seldom find, indeed, that they who once allow themselves in stealing Things of small Value, do long want Courage to proceed to greater. It is the Property of many other Sins, to cloy and weary, and waste the Strength of the Sinner, and so lessen his Inclination to the Practice of them: whereas, such is the peculiar Deceitfulness of *this*, that every Commission of it makes Men bolder, and more enterprizing in Wickedness. They who are now the vilest Sinners of this Sort, who infest our public Roads at Noon-day, and at the Dead of Night break open our Houses: Those abandoned Wretches, who shew themselves with so much Insolence in our Streets; who murder Men without Warning, that they may come at their Pockets without Resistance: even these Men (whom none of you, my Brethren, I am well assured, can think of without Horror) did yet begin their Course with small Transgressions. And they who are now venturing upon the Commission of small Thefts, not without Fear and Trembling, know not where

where they shall stop; nor whether they shall not be so far hardened, as to commit the blackest Crimes without any Remorse at all.

Secondly, These Persons are very apt to plead, in Excuse of their Wickedness, that *great Numbers* are guilty of the Theft we are speaking of, as well as they. Partners in Iniquity do indeed serve to keep one another in Countenance. This lessens the Shame which belongs to the Sin; emboldens Sinners in their evil Practices, and saves them likewise, too often, from the Punishment appointed for them in this World. But *Numbers* will not skreen them from the *Vengeance of God*: the Sin is the same, in his righteous Judgment, whether *one Man* only, or a *Multitude*, be guilty of it; and his all-seeing Eye will find out, and his powerful Arm will punish, *every* Sinner, according to his Works. Some again,

Thirdly, are so modest, as to plead their *Necessity*; what they steal is one of the Necessaries of Life, and they have not wherewithal to purchase it: I might here ask these Persons, whether they do not purchase * *some Things* that are *not needful*; some Things that do not satisfy the Cravings of Hunger, but rather increase them; Things that waste much of their Time, weaken their Nerves, and deprive them of that Strength and Vigour which should be their Support: And † *some Things* again, which serve only to supply the former Loss of their *natural* Spirits with *false and*

* As Tea, &c.

† Spirituous Liquors.

unnatural ones. And will they tell us, after they have laid out their Money upon fashionable and pernicious *Luxuries*, that they are forced to steal the *Necessaries* of Life? But let this pass; for I know how tender the Place is I have touched upon: I would willingly heal their Sores, without putting them to Pain; and if I make use of any Expressions that seem to them Harsh and Severe, they proceed not, I can assure them, from a Want of Compassion, for the Miseries of those who are really Necessitous; but from a sincere Desire of promoting their truest Interests in this World, and their eternal Salvation in the next. For, if I am not very much a Stranger to my own Heart, I have a real and tender Sense of the Hardships and Sufferings of the Poor; yet would have them bear with Patience greater Sufferings than they do, (if it should please God to try their Patience with greater) rather than go about to relieve them by dishonest Practices.

But to return: If this Plea of Necessity would justify their Theft in this Particular, it would justify their stealing any other Thing that is necessary to preserve Life. I grant, that Fuel is necessary to our Subsistence; but it cannot be said to be quite so necessary as our *daily Bread*. Therefore, if Mens Necessities were really such as might excuse them in stealing any Thing, surely it would be more pardonable to steal what we justly call the *Staff of Life*, than any other Thing of equal Value. And yet these Men are sensible enough
of

of the Sinfulness of Theft, in this latter Case; though they make so light of it in the former. But this is easy to be accounted for; they have not such *fair Opportunities* of stealing the one, as they have of the other; and therefore, are willing enough to acknowledge, the great Wickedness of stealing what they cannot *easily come at*; but would fain persuade us, that it is hardly any Sin at all, to steal such Things as lie more *ready to their Hands*: Not considering, that a Man's Property in his Goods is the same, wheresoever they are placed; and therefore, supposing the Things to be equally valuable, and supposing no Violence is used, the Injury done him is the same, whether they are taken out of his House, or his Pocket, his Barn, or his Field.

But we have a still plainer Answer to this Plea of Necessity; which is, that there is a *National Relief* appointed, for all the Wants and Necessities of the *helpless Poor*; and God forbid that it should be denied them. I would to God, that all who have Abilities, would add their private Benevolence to the public Provision, in so liberal a Manner, as might render the Lives of every one of them easy and comfortable: But I must wish too, that both public and private Charities were more confined, than they commonly are, to the Honest and Industrious Poor; and that more Care and Resolution were seen in Parish Officers, and all who have Authority, to correct and amend those who are not so. They would by this Means be the happy Instruments of a
general

general Reformation; they would bring down the Blessings of Heaven upon this sinful Nation; and (what they ought in the first Place to regard) they would discharge the Oath of God, which is bound upon their Consciences. But the Truth is, it is not usually the *helpless Poor* who are guilty of the Crimes we are speaking of: They are not the *Lame*, and the *Blind*; nor the *disconsolate Widow*, nor *Fatherless Children*, who commit these Disorders; but they are the *lusty and strong*; such whose Circumstances place them above being relieved by a legal Charity; who would not accept of it, if it was offered; and such commonly, who can find wherewithal to support them, in sinful and extravagant Vices. Upon all which Accounts, they have not the least Reason to imagine, that their *pretended Necessities* will excuse their *real Crimes*.

And indeed it is exceeding plain, that nothing can be said in Excuse of this wicked Practice. It is a scandalous Violation of the Laws of God and Man, and grown to such a Height, that it is Time for us, to *cry aloud, and shew the People their Transgressions*: It is Time for every honest Man to use his utmost Endeavours to put some Stop to it; not so much on Account of what he may suffer by it in his worldly Affairs, as out of a Christian Compassion to the Souls of Men; of great Numbers of Men, who are sinning, and making a Mock of Sin; breaking, every Day almost, a Divine Commandment: a Commandment, which the great God of Heaven did Himself deliver.

deliver in Thunderings and Lightenings from Mount *Sinai*: And yet these Men make light of it; and seem, all the while they are transgressing it, to say with *Solomon's* Madman, *Am not I in sport?*

It is a just Sense of the terrible Dangers, to which these unhappy Men expose their Souls, that has extorted this plain Discourse from me, to recover, if it may be, those who have gone astray in this Particular; and to prevent all, as much as possible, from falling into this deadly Sin for the Time to come. And notwithstanding the great Prevalency of this evil Custom, I will hope, if I am speaking to any who have hitherto allowed themselves in this sinful Practice, that, by the Assistance of God's Grace, they will seriously consider not so much what I have said, as what God himself says to them in his holy Word, viz. that *Thieves shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

But if they are resolved not to forsake these evil Ways, be the Consequence what it will; if they listen to this Discourse as to a *Tale that is told*, for their *Amusement* only, and not their *Amendment*, for which it is in Sincerity designed; yet, let me prevail with them, when they are going about to rob their Neighbour, in the Instance above-mentioned, to take this *one Thought* along with them; nay, let them leave it behind them, if they can; That the *Fuel* which they steal, may one Day serve, to kindle another *Fire* than what they intend, I mean, (for why should not I speak plainly?) the *Fire of Hell.*

But I said, I would hope for better Things, of all You at least, my Brethren, whom the Providence of God has committed to my Charge; and that you will at length be convinced, how much better it will be for you, in this World and the next, to follow the Advice of the Apostle, in the second Part of the Words, which I can but barely mention, viz. *to Labour, working with your Hands the Thing which is good.* By this Means, you will live in Credit with your Neighbours, and in the Favour of God; you will eat your Meat, which your own Hands have earned, with inexpressible Satisfaction; and the God who has promised, that *he that walketh righteously Bread shall be given him*; the God who hath Pleasure in the Prosperity of his Servants, shall so bless your honest Labours, that you shall have to give, as the Text requires in the last Place, *to him that needeth.* For since the Duty of Almsgiving is recommended, and enjoined even to Persons in mean Circumstances; we need not doubt, but that God, who requires it, will enable them to perform it; that *he that giveth to the Poor shall not lack*; That the honest Labourer, though Poor, shall, by the Blessing of Heaven, have somewhat to spare, for the Relief of him who cannot Labour, who is poorer than himself. This will fill his Mind with Joy and Gladness in this World, and God will abundantly reward his Labours, and his Charity, in the World to come.

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